



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MOTHER'S CONFESSIONAL.

HENRY S. CURTIS.

THOSE who have read Hawthorne's story of "The Marble Faun" will remember the experience of Miriam in St. Peters. She has seen Donatello hurl the blackmailer from the Tarpeian Rock. Her regard for Donatello, and her feeling that the blackmailer has had his deserts make her keep her secret, and the death is reported as an accident; but it preys upon her conscience, and she can find no peace, until, although a Protestant, she goes to the Confessional in St. Peters and tells what she has seen. Then, as though by magic, the oppression melts away, and peace comes to her spirit.

It is not for nothing that the confessional has held its place in the Catholic Church through all the ages, for it has always served the double purpose of keeping the priest in close touch with the lives of his people, and of furnishing relief from sins committed and wrongs done.

Within the last two decades, there has grown up in Vienna, a new school of psychology which is known as psycho-analysis. It originated as a means of treating hysteria, but has since broadened into a general theory of the sub-conscious soul and its inner meaning. While many of us would not be ready to accept the general implications and conclusions of psycho-analysis, we cannot dispute the fact that hysteria and many serious forms of mental aberration are often cured by it. It is simply the method of confession to the doctor of sins committed.

Freud says that these sins concealed become thorns in the spirit which fester and ferment in the darkness until they express themselves in outward physical pains and various undesirable symptoms. But both the pains and symptoms are cured by complete confession with emotion of the sin which caused the trouble. Probably all of us can remember instances from our own childhood where some

particular misdeed of ours made us wretched for weeks or perhaps months, until finally we found a sympathetic ear into which to pour our tale, and then lo, our trouble was gone. The mother is the one safe confessor for every child, and it should be a part of her ambition to fill as perfectly as possible this position.

We little realize childhood's troubles and fears. We adults have forgotten them. I once went through with care a questionnaire which brought in several thousand replies on, "the fears of little children." The astonishing thing was, that while these fears often made children wretched for months or years they were seldom told, and most of them were absolutely groundless. I have often taken little children from the city into the woods and have nearly always found them afraid of wolves, and bears, and lions. They never seem to appreciate that these fierce animals of fairy tales and picture books are not found in Massachusetts or Michigan. When I was a boy of five, a neighbor of ours shot himself, and for three years afterward my life was made wretched by a fear that my father would do the same. We once had a little girl of four in our home for about a year. She was always afraid that we might leave her in the woods or at some of the places to which we went, I suppose on account of the story of Hansel and Gretel, and she always wanted to be perfectly sure that we had no such idea in our minds.

Not only is there this great range of groundless fears but there are the little anxieties to which children are constantly exposed—in regard to health, to hellfire in the olden days, to school work and other things. The great majority of these anxieties also would be quieted if the child and mother were in closer sympathy and understanding.

And then there are the sins of omission and commission of which we have been guilty. The thing which we were told to do and did not do, or the wrong committed. All of these not only weigh upon the spirit and spoil the spontaneity of childhood but trouble its sleep as well.

Every mother should establish her confessional at the

bedside, and strive for a fifteen or twenty minute period of the greatest intimacy every evening before the child goes to sleep. In this the events of the day and the plans of the morrow should be talked over that the child may have peaceful sleep, and that he may go to the new day with an untroubled conscience.

If the mother is to have this confidence and is to serve as the real mother-confessor, she must cultivate this intimacy from the earliest years, and show by her interest that she wants to hear all of the little events and adventures in the daily lives of her children. If she does not show interest, she will not be told, neither will she if she is too much horrified by things committed. She must maintain an attitude of constructive criticism by always being in perfect sympathy with the child. Her suggestions must be helpful so that the child feels that he has found both peace and a solution to his difficulties.

Many of us have wished that we might begin our lives again and avoid the mistakes we have made. This opportunity is given to every mother if she will enter thus sympathetically into the lives of her children, and know both what the day has yielded and what is planned for the morrow. It means much to the children to be thus relieved of their fears, to have adult counsel each day for the trials of the day, and to know that there is someone who understands and is deeply concerned about each event in their lives. If it is possible for the mother to establish and maintain such a confessional, it will solve the chief problems of delinquency and much of the unhappiness of childhood.

HENRY S. CURTIS.

✓ OBERLIN, OHIO.